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ABSTRACT

To achieve the goal of communicative competence, second language instruction should incorporate the results of ethnomethodology research. Ethnomethodologists are interested in the shared rules of interpretation which members of a culture utilize during their conversational interchanges. "Applied ethnomethodology" in the ESL classroom would mean inclusion of materials which explicitly point out those implicit, underlying rules for interaction used by Americans, especially where they differ from the students' own. For example, the Japanese have a very strict code for who speaks next in a conversation--the older, higher--ranking person holding the floor until he voluntarily yields it to another. Interruption is frowned upon and there is little tradition of a dialectic style. The Japanese, then, as well as other non-native English speakers, must learn not only a new language structure but new language behavior patterns. Rules for speaker selection and rules for interrupting may be introduced by using dialogues or other oral-skill-development techniques which simulate situations where such problems of interaction occur. Triologues, with two native speakers and one non-native speaker, can produce effective results. (HW)

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THE PROBLEM 'WHO SPEAKS NEXT?' CONSIDERED CROSS-CULTURALLY

Once upon a time the field of second language pedagogy was frequently called 'applied linguistics,' at least in many circles. But I think we are less parochial these days. We have become aware that language teachers must draw ideas from all fields which study human language, not solely from linguistics.

This remark concerning 'applied linguistics' should not be interpreted as another deprication of language theorists. Not by any means. Rather than disparaging the input to language pedagogy from linguistics, I am presenting the view that the TESOL field must make use of additional theoretical constructs, as well as those drawn from linguistics. The point of view expressed here is, in essence, an additive one rather than an anti-linguistics stand. In fact, the central theme of this paper is to suggest how input from another theoretical source -- ethnomethodology -- can contribute to the goal of teaching communicative competence.

Annecdotes constitute good material for putting speakers and listeners into the topic at hand. What follows is an annecdote, a true happening which lead me into thinking of ways to expand on the traditional material presented in language lessons.

Not long ago, I showed the venerable MLA film called 'The Sounds of Language,' circa 1960, to a group of instructors and other adults preparing for ESL teaching careers. Many can, I'm sure, recall the film -- one in a series produced over ten years ago which presented the ideology of the audio-lingual method in a teacher training context. For the audience, the experience was similar to, but not quite the same as watching an old movie on television. It was not that the hemlines were too long nor too short or even that the

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length of mens' hair was out of fashion; something else made the film appear extremely dated.

I tried to find out, "What's wrong? Why did you feel that the film was unrealistic? Let's use one scene, analyze the situations, the dialogue, and the actions and try to determine why it seemed so contrived."

We chose the scene in which a few foreign travelers, first a Russian gentleman and then a young Japanese lady, walk up to the information counter at National Airport, Washington, D.C., and ask, "WHEN DOES THE PLANE LEAVE FOR CHICAGO?" We decided to focus on just the interaction between the Japanese lady and the American behind the information counter.

"Now, that's what I don't buy," said one outspoken person.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, in that situation there were so many other elements which clearly announced the cultural background of the speaker that the foreign sounding pronunciation -- the substitution of her sound system for the American English system -- is really a minor cause for potential misunderstanding. Take the way she gave that little bow after the American finishes his line about 'See the man with the tan raincoat standing over there?' She could have missed neither an l or an r sound and would still have been a non-native speaker just by the way she moved her head as a signal of aknowledgement for information offered."

Some other features of that unnatural scene were similarly criticized. Finally, someone offered this comment: "I think there's a level of language called 'ESL dialogue,' the style that appears in our textbooks and that we teach to students, and then there's the way people in American culture speak the language with each other."

"Perhaps it's not only the language itself which is contrived," I suggested, "but there is an entire dimension of language which is missing -- the entire range of shared societal understandings, role-relationships, status designations, appropriateness of language to setting. All of these

are present as implicit knowledge in everyday conversation. What ESL dialogues in textbooks most often seem to be are socially, context-free speech with emphasis placed only on the linguistic code features of language. That's what makes them sound so flat. Even the fact that one of the participants in a typical dialogue -- as in the case of the Japanese traveling lady in the film -- is obviously of another culture itself enters into the interplay in a real conversation."

All of us taking part in that discussion carried on a fantasy in which we gave ourselves the assignment to rewrite the script for the film. What should we add? Probably many more people. She might have had to ask directions more than once. Someone could have given her directions and then repeated a paraphrase of the same message. Or, she could have asked a couple, standing together, one might have started answering her and then the other breaks in, interrupting with something like, "No, dear, not gate 24, the plane for Chicago always leaves from gate 44."

Later, upon reflection, I realized that the suggestions which the class had made for rewriting the National Airport information booth scene added up to the recommendation which sociologist Allen Grimshaw made in his talk at last year's TESOL convention. He said, "There are grammars of social interaction for different groups -- these grammars of social relationships play a vital part in everyday talk."

It is not at all unusual for new learners of languages to find that the real problems arise, not through misunderstandings caused by deviant syntax or pronunciation, but when they try to use the new language in social situations among native speakers. Or, in reverse, consider the unsureness, the uncertainty native English speakers feel when we go into a different culture with a minimum-to-moderate language speaking skill, but with a lack of awareness of the social concomitants of conversational situations.

In an attempt to incorporate a broader spectrum of language behavior, I have been working out some ways to include the results of ethnomethodology research in language teaching materials. I believe that if the language pedagogy profession seriously takes on the goal of teaching communicative competence then it must have materials which explicitly point out the ways in which members of a culture interact with each other and organize their behavior in respect to each other during conversational interchanges.

Within the broad field of sociology, ethnomethodologists are interested in finding the shared rules of interpretation which members of a culture utilize to conduct their most mundane, practical affairs. Even the everyday business of talking with each other and carrying on conversations. So, if a connection with any discipline needs to be designated for the ideas outlined in this paper then it would be most accurate to call them 'applied ethnomethodology.'

The problem, who speaks next in a conversation, or next-speaker-selection, is an active research question of ethnomethodology. It is not at all difficult to know who speaks next when there are mechanisms such as convention programs, schedules, titles of talks and the like. But contrast the rules for just such a formal occasion as the one I'm speaking at with an informal conversation among either intimate or non-intimate participants.

In the latter case, there are implicit, underlying rules regulating next-speaker-selection, but they are not displayed in surface paraphernalia like lists of speakers names. Instead, speakers themselves unconsciously make use of conversational rules which select a next-speaker. The research task of ethnomethodologists is to discover these rules, in effect, to write grammars of shared rules of interaction. A parallel can be drawn between the rules of interaction which ethnomethodologists seek to characterize and the deep structure, grammatical rules which generative linguists postulate to describe surface, spoken utterances. In both cases, the research-theorist looks for organizing criteria which are predictive, in the one case of

language behavior, in the other of language structure.

The title of this paper is 'the problem who speaks next considered cross-culturally.' But for the next few paragraphs I want to leave other cultures out of the discussion and look at talk in American society -- an immense terrain. Ethnomethodologists have been studying, noting, and observing the structure of conversation in this culture. I am referring to the body of work produced, among others, by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Erving Goffman. There are societal rules which determine who to talk to, what to talk about, when to talk, how or with what affect to talk. There are as well -- and this is what ethnomethodologists try to get at -- social norms which, as part of the communication code, govern our understanding of events in somewhat the same way as grammars govern our perception of speech.

Here is a concrete example of just such a social norm. There is a rule of conversation in the society of which I am a member. That rule says: one person speaks at a time. One way to realize that the rule exists is to examine the language socializing process which children in middle class, mainstream American life experience and which shapes them to attend to this conversational rule. For example, consider the frequency of admonitions such as, "It's not nice to interrupt." "Don't talk unless you're spoken to." This socializing process is manifested, too, by the great effort made in American classrooms to get kids to listen to the person who teacher has chosen to speak. There is decided emphasis placed on being quiet when teacher is talking: "Don't talk out without raising your hand, Johnny. Only one person speaks at a time."

The accomplishment of this rule, one person speaks at a time, is brought about by the speakers themselves, for speakers have the competence to hand the conversation to another. A transparent way in which this is carried out takes place in the question-answer couplet. By asking a question, the speaker says, "Now it's your turn to talk."

Another conversational structure is the chaining rule. It is closely

related to next-speaker-selection. The person who asks a question has a right to speak again, or has reserved the right to talk again after the one to whom he has addressed the question speaks. And, in using the reserved right, he can ask a question. Chaining provides for an indefinitely long conversation: the sequence q.a.q.a.q.a. . . .

Here is an example of a blocking mechanism which prevents chaining. It too involves questions. Six to ten year old children in American society frequently begin a conversation (particularly when addressing adults) with the question, "You know what?" The answer is "What?" If 'What' is replied to then the chaining rule is turned around. Thus, the initial questioner has not selected to use the chaining rule, or has blocked the chaining rule.

Processes of tying play crucial roles in topic selection in conversations. Speakers tie the content of their talk to previous utterances by a variety of mechanisms. But tying is also related to next-speaker-selection. In dyadic conversations, the rule is alternation between the two speakers. (In larger groups, there are probably more complex patterns.) If next speaker is indicated by asking a question, then the addressee has the right to the floor whenever he chooses to talk and the asker has the right after the responder. The rule is such that other material can intervene between question and response.

An interesting way to realize that next-speaker-selection is performed in conversations is to look at some contrastive data from other cultures. I think the result of looking at who-speaks-next in other cultures will turn up evidence that the topic and how it is accomplished by speakers in English will be something which needs to be explicitly taught to those who have other interactional rules. That is, if in all cases they do it differently from our way.

The field is not bulging with ethnographic reports, but anthropologists have furnished us with some observations which help to make the point. For example, Ethel Albert has written at length regarding the Burundi of Africa:

> The order in which individuals speak in a group is strictly determined by seniority of rank. If the eldest present is lower in social rank than some other individual, age gives way before social status. Thus, a nephew may be older than his uncle but the uncle is of higher rank and will speak before him. A prince or chief may be younger than others present but speaks first by virtue of higher rank. There are no recorded instances of confusion or conflict in the matter of determing order or precedence, even in very large groups.
>
> In public, the rule for servants, females and other inferiors is to speak when spoken to but otherwise to maintain silence. Nevertheless, the pattern is so arranged that younger or socially inferior persons are in due course able to express their views . . . Thus, the senior person will speak first, the next in order of rank opens his speech with a statement to the effect, 'Yes, I agree with the previous speaker, he is correct, he is older and knows best, etc.' This next speaker can take a diametrically opposed view to his elder, but since he has carried out the ritual of acknowledging the superior, no offense is taken. (pg. 40-41)

My interest in contrasting features of speaker sequencing in my own society with those in others led me to inquire into conversational practices among the Japanese. Relying on respondents and accounts in the literature, I was able to isolate a few features which potentially may turn out to govern rules for speaker selection in that culture.

Rank, again, seems to play the pivotal role. The senior, or older person (or other ranking member) holds the floor until my means of overt grammatical markers at the close of an utterance (<u>desu</u>, <u>arimasu</u>) he signals that another can speak. I listened to tapes of informal conversation among close friends speaking Japanese and noted the repeated appearance of the particle <u>no</u> (with falling intonation) and a long pause following. My Japanese respondent commented: "I feel it means the speaker wants to talk more on the same subject. I wouldn't interrupt here."

In other tapes of Japanese conversation, the speakers were father and his adult age son, who happened to be my respondent. Father talked in lengthy episodes. I noted long, drawn out pauses. "Can you interrupt his now? Could you break in and begin talking here," I asked.

"No, I never interrupt him. I always let Father finish," respondent-son

replied.

This data is not meant to be anything more than suggestive of the contrastive possibilities in the next-speaker-selection problem. But parallel accounts do appear in the social science literature on current life in Japan. Japanese sociologist Chie Nakane has described conversation style among the members of his own society in these terms:

> The consciousness of rank which leads the Japanese to ignore logical procedure is also manifested in the patterns and practices of daily conversation in which a senior or an elderly man monopolizes the talk while those junior to them have the role of a listener. Generally there is no development of dialectic style in a Japanese conversation which is guided from beginning to end by the interpersonal relations which exist between the speakers. In most cases a conversation is . . . . a one-sided sermon, the 'I agree completely' style of communication, which does not allow for the statement of opposite views.
> (P. 34)

My Japanese respondent (currently a graduate student at an American university) became intrigued with the intent of the querries. "I can feel myself carrying over the same pattern from Japanese into English," he observed. "I sit in classes, know the answers to the instructor's questions, but the others are always ahead of me in knowing how to start up and talk. My Japanese approach is to remain silent because I wouldn't talk out in a classroom in Japan . . . I feel that way sometimes, too, when I talk with American friends."

In contrast with Japanese speaker selection, here are some observations of how speakers in the culture of which I am a member manage the business of interrupting each other. Remember, the rule of conversation says, one person talks at a time. We have already noted some structural processes by which next-speaker-selection is accomplished. But we <u>do</u> interrupt. What I am getting at here begins to shape up like this: doing interruptions in conversation is an artful accomplishment of speakers. The societal rule says, one speaker at a time, but there are socially sanctioned

ways to interrupt without being rude. Further, it is these kinds of societal rules for interrupting which my Japanese respondent needed to learn in order to interact successfully in conversations with his fellow American students.

It seems to be the case that one speaker can intrude on another's talk if his intrusion indicates a high degree of affect. Showing involvment, concern, anger, laughter -- each can bring about a successful interruption into someone else's talk. An obvious intrusion is accomplished by means of any one of a set of vocalisms, or non-verbal soundings, which establish involved hearership. It is easier to slide from the affirming vocalism, mmm or uh uh into an actual interruption than to break in cold, so to speak.

Another opportunity for interrupting artfully takes place when the speaker (or floor-holder) himself uses a vocalism which displays hesitation or vacilation. The aaa.... which fills in space for a speaker while he reaches for a phrase offers ground for an interrupter to step in.

Closely related to phenomena of hesitation vocalisms are occurrences of the absence of speech. Conversations are not totally filled with talk. Pauses and silence are meaningful components of conversation. In this culture, when a floor-holder or speaker fails to indicate a next speaker and simply pauses, the results can be complex. One possible display is an interruption which takes place as an echoing or confirming statement on the part of the hearer of what has just been said. But this tentative display is actually a claim for speakership -- "I'll try a round now if you are ready to relinquish."

An elongated pause seems to be a place where not only can permissible interrupting take place, but under certain circumstances interrupting is obligatory since the very occurrence of overlong silence is uncomfortable to both speaker and hearer. For unlike the Japanese respondent's reaction to elongated pauses mentioned previously, members of this culture tend to follow the rule, keep the conversation going at all times. The ball should

be in play fifty nine and one-half seconds out of every minute.

A short pause, of the kind when a speaker is searching for just the right word, is a place to find displays of veritable prowess in interrupting. The moment when the speaker scans his memory for the appropriate expression presents an opportunity for another speaker to break in. There are, in fact, speakers who practice the skill with consumate verbal art. I am referring to those insidious persons, sentence completers. In the guise of being helpful listeners they complete your sentence for you -- virtuosos can even break into a complex verb phrase.

In those few other cultures which we looked at, the next-speaker-selection problem depended rather significantly on complex status designations among the participants. I would not want to suggest that in the egalitarian society I now have been describing participants in conversations are necessarily free from a determination of next-speaker based on relative status or roles. However, I believe that the status designations in this culture are more oblique. I have observed, for example, that in particular professional-to-client relationships somewhat special rules of order in conversation prevail.

In the relationship of therapist to patient, or lawyer to client the dispenser of service is more apt to give up the speakership when his role is that of a professional than he would when he is interacting as a non-professional.

There are many role relationships in this culture which call for a display of deference on the part of one member toward another of higher status. Generally speaking, these status bearing relationships can more often be located in dyads such as employer and employee, professor and student, medical doctor and patient, and, for some, parent and offspring. There are, undoubtedly, others which belong on the list.

Another technique for interrupting is through the use of a summons. A rule for summonses in American schoolrooms is, "Johnny, raise your hand

if you want to talk." But how do you get teacher's attention? Usually, by calling out her name simultaneously with raising the hand. But the usage, title plus family name, is more acceptable in American schoolrooms than the nonstandard pattern for a summons, "Teacher."

The use of a name alone is a high frequency summons: Bob; Martha; Mommie. Titles used alone are less intimate summonses: Operator? Mr. Moderator; Chairperson. Whereas pet names are at the other end of the intimacy scale: Honey-pie; Sweetie; Sugar; Tiger.

As noted by Emanuel Schegloff, in this society the mechanical ring of a telephone also serves as a summons. Schegloff has observed that for some the rule of "don't interrupt" prevails even for the ring of a telephone. Such persons find it difficult to pick up a receiver until the pause occurs between the rings.

Now I want to suggest some first, tentative steps into a veritably unknown territory. The question is, how do we go about incorporating societal rules for talk -- for example rules for interrupting and rules for speaker selection -- into language teaching materials? I propose that one approach to follow is for dialogues, or any materials which are practiced and learned in language classes, to be composed by native speakers in and during the class session itself. The following is a list of strategies which could be carried out to put this idea into practice:

(1) If communicative competence is to be our goal then we must, I believe, add to our bag of tricks some intermediate steps between the format, foreigner and native speaker in dialogues. I suggest the triologue form. The triologue is composed of two native speakers plus one non-native. The natives can be paraprofessionals, older students, buddies of the teacher -- it doesn't matter. Let the native speakers act as themselves. In being themselves, in being authentic they offer a greater possibility for the social context of the talk to be real.

(2) Do conversation practices or triologues without a written script. Give the two native speakers in the triologue a situation, an action, a theme, or a motive. Follow a format similar to playing charades. See what happens.

(3) Give the non-native, the student, explicit directions to try to break into their conversation. We need to work out procedures such as tracking exercises: the student looks for ground for doing an interruption. We need to work out materials which control the talking process so that one device is practiced at a time. Instruction to student: try to break in by trying your topic selection to that of the person you interrupt. Or, break in by doing a sentence completion. Or, break in my means of eying (eye-contact).

(4) Practice conversations in which one speaker is explicitly told to keep the other's talk going. Direction to student: be speaker supportive. Later, contrast this with interrupting practice.

(5) Again, using native and non-native speakers: Work out some interactional minimal pairs. Use the same script, but play the scene again changing one feature of either the role-relationships, the setting, or the degree of intimacy. Practice some other socially relevant minimal pairs: Use the same conversation, but change the occupations of the participants, change the status designations, change the age, or the sex.

(6) Elicit contrastive information regarding features of conversation structure from older or adult ESL students. This data will help the teacher decide what features of conversation might need to be emphasized. It turned out that Japanese speakers have difficulty knowing how to interrupt in English. However, I have observed cultures where the rule one speaker at a time does <u>not</u> necessarily prevail, at least in certain settings. Just as the rule: people line up for busses does not universally hold true.

These suggestions have been put forth as brainstorming ideas. But

the work must begin somewhere. I expect to continue grappling with the problem of devising strategies for teaching interactional rules in English language teaching materials. I see this work as the central problem in the quest for incorporating basic features of communicative competence in programs of second language instruction.

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